

BOOK REVIEW

By LEWIS GANNETT

EISENHOWER'S SIX GREAT DECISIONS. By Gen. Walter Bedell Smith. Longmans, Green. 237 pages. \$3.95.

SPEAKING in "Crusade in Europe" of Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, his Chief of Staff of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe, Gen. Eisenhower said simply, "He was a godsend—a master of detail with clear comprehension of main issues." Now, in a work published on the twelfth anniversary of one of the greatest events in military history, Gen. Smith makes those main issues clear even for the layman. It is a little book that naturally includes much that first appeared in Gen. Eisenhower's big one, but nevertheless it makes its own contribution in terms of emphasis and a participant's commentary.



Gen. Walter Bedell Smith

Man Alone

From the infinitely complex story that began with the planning of "Overlord"—can any one have forgotten that code-name for the cross-Channel invasion?—Gen. Smith selects and analyzes six decisive highlights. Each of the six represents a decision that Gen. Eisenhower alone had finally to make, a task rendered no easier by the fact that the opinions sometimes differed among the able men around him. It is Gen. Smith's contention that, in every case, the Supreme Commander turned out to be right.

Obviously, in "Crusade in Europe" Gen. Eisenhower stressed neither the correctness of his judgment nor the awful solitude in which he arrived at it, though the one was apparent in the outcome of the campaign and the other implicit in the fact of command. Gen. Smith can and does stress them, vividly and without hero-worship.

The first and probably the most harrowing of those decisions involved D-Day. June 5 was theoretically the ideal one for tide and moon,

but at 4 a. m. that day the wind was strong, the sky cloudy. To a conference at that hour came the meteorologists, predicting calm weather on the morning of the 6th but high winds and rough seas again that night. The decision: to risk invasion in that slight break in the Channel's worst weather in twenty years, or a dangerous postponement. Then, after all the talk: "The silence lasted for five full minutes while Gen. Eisenhower sat on a sofa before the bookcase which filled the end of the room. I never realized before the loneliness and isolation of a commander at a time when such a momentous decision has to be taken, with full knowledge that success or failure rests on his judgment alone. He sat there quietly, not getting up to pace with quick strides as he often does. He was tense, weighing every consideration of weather as he had been briefed to do during the dry runs since April, and weighing with them those other imponderables.

"Finally he looked up, and the tension was gone from his face.

"He said briskly, 'Well, we'll go!'"

The second great decision was to exploit the Germans' insistence on standing and fighting in Normandy instead of retreating and preserving what they could; the third, to respond immediately and in force to the German challenge in the Ardennes which developed into the Battle of the Bulge; the fourth, to defeat the Germans as severely as possible west of the Rhine, destroying there the reserves that would be needed later; fifth, to envelop and seal off the Ruhr, heart of the German war potential; sixth, the Rhine having been crossed, to root out and destroy all resistance in the German homeland.

End of a Mission

Eleven months and two days after that first decision in the early hours of June 5, 1944, came surrender—and with it the end of what Gen. Smith believes to have been the only "great campaign [that] has ever been fought... with so little change in its original strategic plan." Tactics did change according to circumstances, notably in Normandy. The large concept carried straight through to the time when, his staff having tried their hands at various flowery phrases in a victory message, Gen. Eisenhower wrote his own final report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

"The mission of this Allied force was fulfilled at 0241 local time, May 7, 1945," it said.